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Social and human rights questions: advancement of women

Report of the Board of Trustees of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women on its nineteenth session

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* E/1999/100 and Add.1.

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I. Matters brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council

1. At its nineteenth session, the Board of Trustees of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) decided that the Institute should continue to operate with present core staff until 31 December 1999 in order to enable it to comply with the mandate given by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1998/48 of 31 July 1998 and report to the Council at its substantive session of 1999 and to the General Assembly.

2. As a measure to increase the Institute's financial reserves, the Board recommended that Member States be encouraged to expedite payment of pledged contributions.

3. The Board authorized the President and the former President to meet with the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management to discuss the issue of a waiver of the programme support costs and a rent-free space for an INSTRAW liaison office in New York.

4. The Board recommended that in consultations with relevant offices of the United Nations, INSTRAW could explore the possibility of having its reports published and disseminated by the Publications Service of the Secretariat pending such time as INSTRAW might again be able to absorb such costs.

5. The Board recommended that the post of Director of INSTRAW be filled for an interim period of six months and that the process of selection should be in close consultation with the Board. Until that position was filled, the Board also recommended that the most senior officer of INSTRAW should work closely with the Board to undertake the necessary action to prepare for the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council.

6. The Board decided to establish a working group to prepare a position paper on the future status of INSTRAW for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session at Geneva in 1999. This Working Group would be composed of the Bureau of the Board, one representative of the Secretariat and one representative of the INSTRAW staff. The Working Group would take into consideration the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and document INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.3 in the preparation of the policy paper by mid-June.

7. The Board recommended that a group entitled "Friends of INSTRAW" be established. The group should consist of former members of the Board, eminent women and men, and experts on gender and women's issues. The main task of this group would be to bring visibility to INSTRAW and assist in securing financial and political support.

8. With some modifications agreed upon during its deliberations, the Board endorsed the INSTRAW strategic plan and work programme, 2000–2003 to serve as an early warning system, clearing-house and networking with other institutes on gender issues and the advancement of women.

II. Progress report on the activities of INSTRAW for 1998

9. At its 1st meeting, under agenda item 4, the Board reviewed the progress report on the activities of INSTRAW for 1998 (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.2), presented by the former Director of INSTRAW. In introducing the document, she informed the Board that despite the difficult situation INSTRAW was in, it was worthwhile to look at its accomplishments. She reported that the Institute had taken numerous initiatives aimed at revitalization, including: (a) a dynamic research and training programme; (b) preparation of extrabudgetary project proposals and activities; (c) increased dialogue for confidence-building at the inter-agency level, focal points and the Board of Trustees; (d) reinstatement of the internship programme, which allowed for three interns at Headquarters and three in the New York Liaison Office; (e) cost-effectiveness and work efficiency; (f) enhancing the capacity of the Liaison Office, which was not made possible given the lack of funds for posting a P-5 staff member as was planned; (g) structural and substantive evaluation of the Institute; and (h) preparation of a strategic work plan for INSTRAW. She stated that the research programmes were progressing as planned. She reported on her efforts to seek funding for the extrabudgetary proposals and informed the Board of a partnership that had been established with the United Nations University (UNU) for a research project on women and conflict in the Balkans. That project would be initiated once the situation in the region became more stable.

10. The former Director described some of the measures that had been taken in order to increase cost-effectiveness and work efficiency. Among them were: closing of in-house printing facilities; expanding the electronic communication system; and staff reduction measures which resulted in the abolishment of 12 General Service posts and the deferment of filling two Professional posts (D-1 and P-2).

11. A discussion followed in which various Board members expressed their views regarding possible sources of funding and partnership for research and training

programmes which should be further pursued by the Institute. Some of the suggested avenues included, *inter alia*, linkages with focal points, regional bodies and related research institutes, revenue generation through training programmes and the efforts of members of the Board in getting their Governments to pay their pledges.

III. Review of the financial situation of INSTRAW

12. At its 1st, 2nd and 3rd meetings, under agenda item 5, the former Director of INSTRAW presented the report on the assessment of the current financial crisis of INSTRAW (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.3). The Board also had before it documents INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.1 and INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.2.

13. The former Director of INSTRAW introduced the assessment report and noted the limited funds with which the Institute had functioned since its inception. She then highlighted the current financial crisis, which had led to management decisions involving staff reductions and other cost-effective measures in order not to jeopardize ongoing programmes. In assessing the factors leading to the current financial and institutional crisis, she noted a number of vulnerabilities in the institutional structure of INSTRAW. In that regard, she mentioned the Institute's autonomous status and sole reliance on voluntary contributions which had at times limited its capacity to benefit from closer contact with the United Nations system. With regard to its funding modality, she indicated that the Institute was not able to secure alternative sources of funding, thereby affecting its resource base.

14. Another factor contained in the report referred to the limited geographic outreach. She explained that the Liaison Office in New York was unable to provide more than logistical and administrative support. Moreover, given the financial constraints, INSTRAW was unable to strengthen that Office and to establish offices in other regions.

15. The former Director also described the three periods of the Institute's history, namely, the growth period during which INSTRAW produced pioneering work (1978–1991), regression, when funds and implementation were steadily declining; and revitalization efforts (1998), in which a new focus was given to the research and training programmes and the level of implementation was increased in comparison to previous years.

16. Both the former Director and some Board members noted and appreciated the work of the Institute despite the difficult circumstances and limited staff. Concern was raised as to whether the ongoing programmes could be finalized, given that only two Professional staff members would remain past 30 June 1999.

17. It was also pointed out that several meetings had been organized since the last session of the Board by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Special Adviser and the former Director with Permanent Representatives, including two meetings with women Permanent Representatives, and government officials of both donor and non-donor countries, regional groups and other donor sources to raise funds for INSTRAW.

18. Discussions ensued on the actual resources available in the Institute's Trust Fund. As a result, the representatives of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts were requested to submit in writing a statement of the available cash balance to date. That statement, subsequently submitted to the Board, presented a balance sheet which indicated the financial situation of INSTRAW as of 30 April 1999. In response to numerous queries from the Board, the Chief of the Economic, Social and Human Rights Service of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts confirmed that there was an available cash balance of $408,358 in the Trust Fund in addition to the $200,000 operating reserve.

19. After having determined the available cash balance in the Institute's Trust Fund, the Board requested from INSTRAW an estimate of operating costs within the current staffing configuration through 31 December 1999. Upon reviewing the estimated budget submitted by INSTRAW, the Board decided to recommend that the Institute continue to operate with the present core staff until 31 December 1999 in order to enable it to comply with the requirements of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly as well as finalize the ongoing research programmes. Given the procedural requirements of such a measure and the fact that new contracts would need to be issued by June, the Board requested the assistance of the Executive Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in facilitating that process.

20. Regarding the vacant post of Director of INSTRAW, the Board recommended that it be filled as soon as possible in order to assist in matters relating to INSTRAW's compliance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/48. Until that position was filled, the Board also recommended that the most senior officer of INSTRAW should work closely with the Board to undertake the necessary action to prepare for the forthcoming session of the Council. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General

on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women briefed the Board on steps being taken to secure an individual from within the United Nations system at a suitably senior level to take on the responsibilities of Officer-in-Charge. In the meantime, with the approval of the former President of the Board, the Special Adviser had been in frequent contact with INSTRAW staff to guide the Institute's work.

21. As a measure to increase the Institute's financial reserves on a short-term basis, the Board recommended that Member States be urged to expedite payment of pledged contributions. In that regard, it was decided that the President of the Board should write to Member States encouraging prompt payment. The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would also be requested to write a letter to the same effect. In addition, it was agreed that Board members would follow up on unpaid pledges and actively carry out fund-raising with their governments.

22. The representative of the host country, along with several Board members inquired about the amount paid by INSTRAW to the United Nations for programme support costs. After consultations with the representative of the Office of Legal Affairs, the Board decided that the President, accompanied by the former President, should seek a waiver of those charges until such time that the Institute's financial reserves were strengthened. Likewise a similar request would be made for the provision of a rent-free space to accommodate an INSTRAW office in New York. Following a meeting with the Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Management, the Board of Trustees was informed that the waiver of programme support costs was not possible. However, the request on both issues would be considered after a written request was made by the President of the Board.

23. Another decision taken by the Board for alleviating the financial constraints affecting the Institute concerned the publication of the forthcoming research studies. Given that the Publications Service of the Secretariat had indicated its interest in printing INSTRAW publications, it was recommended that that option be further pursued for the printing of the research studies.

IV. Other issues of relevance to the functioning of the Institute

24. At its 3rd meeting, the Board considered other issues of relevance to the functioning of the Institute under agenda item 6. The Board had before it a note by the Secretariat entitled "The future status of INSTRAW: policy considerations" (INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.3).

25. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW introduced document INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.3. He suggested that although the report of the Joint Inspection Unit was not yet available, the Board might wish to concentrate its deliberations on the four areas mentioned in paragraph 12 of the document.

26. In reference to the first area concerning the relative importance of the research and training functions for the advancement of women, he proposed two possible models. The first represented a case in which the research agenda would determine the training agenda. Providing an example, he indicated that that could be a case in which an institute's research competence in statistics and indicators might then be the basis for the development of a training programme in that area. Such a training programme would certainly build up competence in a given thematic area, thereby leading to credibility, but would tend to limit the field for training. The second example would be a case in which the training agenda was determined on the basis of market demand, rather than exclusively connected to the research, as was done in the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the Staff College.

27. Continuing with his presentation, he discussed the next two areas outlined in the document, which emphasized linkages with intergovernmental bodies and inter-agency entities. He gave an example of the relationship between the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the Division for Social Policy and Development and the Commission for Social Development. He noted the role of UNRISD in conducting independent research in areas of relevance to the Commission. In its role to service the Commission, the Division for Social Policy and Development was able to utilize that research to feed into the intergovernmental process. He also noted a possible linkage between research and operational activities of the United Nations. As an example, he mentioned the relationship between the Population Division of the Secretariat and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). He pointed out that geographical proximity was an important factor in strengthening those linkages. In that regard he noted that should INSTRAW pursue that model, a liaison office in New York as it had functioned in the past would not be sufficient. Such an office should be staffed at a senior level. He pointed out that the identity of each of the entities involved was not compromised in those institutional modalities and that cooperation rather than competition prevailed.

28. Another area mentioned in the document concerned closer links to the United Nations University and other research institutions. In that regard, he said that with that modality INSTRAW would link to research institutes rather than to the intergovernmental process. He went on to describe the system of centres established by the University in various regions and the funding implications of an INSTRAW link with UNU.

29. After deliberations on the areas outlined by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW, the Board thanked the Special Representative and Under-Secretary-General for his very clear statement of the issues. It also expressed its concern that given the complexity of the matter and the lack of more detailed information, the time allowed for the session was not sufficient for it to make a definite recommendation. Therefore, the Board decided to establish a working group which would prepare a position paper on the future status of INSTRAW for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council. The Board expressed its concern that the Working Group should also take into consideration the report of the Joint Inspection Unit when preparing the position paper. The Board agreed that the position paper would be circulated among Board members and the Executive Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for comments prior to finalization and submission to the Economic and Social Council by mid-June at the latest. It was agreed that the Working Group would be composed of the Bureau of the Board, a representative of the Secretariat and a representative of the INSTRAW staff.

V. Strategic plan and work programme, 2000–2003 for INSTRAW

30. At its 4th meeting, the Board considered the strategic plan and work programme, 2000–2003 for INSTRAW under item 7 of the provisional agenda (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.1/Rev.1). The Board had before it documents INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.4 and INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.4.

31. The senior officer of INSTRAW introduced the documents for the consideration of the Board of Trustees by stating that the strategic plan and work programme for INSTRAW had been prepared in compliance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/48.

32. She began her presentation with an overview of the strategic goals as contained in paragraph 23 of document INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.4, making reference in each case to the proposed action for their achievement as contained in table 1, "Programme and project matrix". In the Board's consideration of the strategic plan, she requested that it bear in mind the fact that the plan had been prepared on the basis of criteria which coincided with those outlined by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW. She pointed out that the Inter-Agency Brainstorming Workshop (3 and 4 May 1999) had made valuable contributions to the issues that would need to be addressed by INSTRAW in its new strategic plan. She further noted that many of the issues raised during the Brainstorming Workshop as contained in document INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.4 had already been addressed in the strategic plan and work programme.

33. Many of the Board members commended the former Director and staff of INSTRAW for the preparation of the strategic plan and work programme. Some members expressed concern that the current financial situation of INSTRAW would hinder the implementation of such a strategy as well as the preparation of a programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001. In the light of that discussion, it was proposed that the strategic goals be reviewed and streamlined in order to present a more focused and realistic strategic plan given the current situation.

34. The Board discussed the contents of section VI of document INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.4, "Financing, staffing and institutional set-up", particularly those paragraphs relating to the role of the Board of Trustees and its modality of operation. As a result, the Board decided to delete paragraphs 71, 72, 73 and 75. At the suggestion of some Board members, it was decided to recommend strongly the creation of a group of Friends of INSTRAW which could comprise former Board members, notable personalities and other relevant experts on gender issues and the advancement of women. It was agreed that such a group could be active in seeking political and financial support for INSTRAW.

35. The Board then reviewed each of the strategic goals as contained in paragraph 23 of the document. After a lengthy discussion as to how to make those goals more attractive to donors while safeguarding the mandate of the Institute, the Board decided to make some modifications to the strategic goals as follows: (a) to merge strategic goals I and IV; (b) to rephrase strategic goal II to indicate that INSTRAW would conduct comparative research; (c) to emphasize the role of INSTRAW in promoting research capacity-building for women's organizations and research centres, especially in developing countries as indicated in strategic goal V; (d) to merge strategic goals VI and VII; and (e) to delete strategic goals III and VIII.

VI. Organization of the session

A. Opening and duration of the session

36. The nineteenth session of the Board of Trustees of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 5 to 7 May 1999. The Board held five meetings.

37. The session was opened by the President of the Board, Ms. Esther Ashton. She welcomed all the Board members, especially the new member, Ms. Cecilia Valcárcel Alcázar, and mentioned that Ms. Mamosebi Theresia Pholo was unable to attend. In her opening remarks, the President of the Board detailed the various activities undertaken on behalf of INSTRAW during her tenure as President. In an effort to gain support for INSTRAW, those activities included meetings with women ambassadors to the United Nations, the representative of the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP), as well as representatives of the Group of 77 and the European Union. In addition to regular consultations and discussions with the Director of INSTRAW, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Office of Legal Affairs and the Office of the Controller, she also attended sessions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women where she sought both financial and political support for the Institute.

38. The President addressed the issue of the vacant post of Director of INSTRAW and reiterated the need for the appointment of a senior officer who could provide high-level representation of the Institute in the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in addition to providing follow-up to the Institute's operations and future directions. She also expressed concern about the fact that by the end of June 1999 only two Professional officers would remain at INSTRAW, as it was anticipated that the contracts of all other staff would expire on 30 June 1999.

39. Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, addressed the Board of Trustees and urged that the Board pay close attention to the four suggestions contained in the document entitled "The future status of INSTRAW: policy considerations" (INSTRAW/BT/1999/CRP.3).

40. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women welcomed all participants on behalf of the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW and emphasized the unique importance of the session, given the current situation affecting the Institute. In that regard, she expressed her trust that the Board would make clear recommendations to the Economic and Social Council in order to assist the Council in taking the best decision for the future of INSTRAW. She also emphasized that there was wide support on the part of the management of the United Nations Secretariat and among agencies for INSTRAW to continue to carry out its mandate. She concluded by expressing her gratitude to the host country for its continuous support and to the staff of INSTRAW, including the former Director, for their further efforts in preparing the papers.

41. The Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic welcomed the opportunity to address the Board of Trustees and reiterated the full support of the Government of the Dominican Republic in hosting the headquarters of INSTRAW. Moreover, she reiterated her Government's opposition to moving the headquarters of the Institute to another country, as its location was mandated by Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/11 of 9 May 1979. She cautioned against a decision on the future of INSTRAW being made prior to consideration of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, which would be deliberated on at the next session of the Economic and Social Council. Finally, she restated the position of her Government that an interim director should be appointed as soon as possible.

42. The Senior Officer-in-Charge of INSTRAW welcomed all participants to the nineteenth session and expressed her trust that the deliberations of the Board would yield recommendations and decisions commensurate with the crucial issues currently threatening the existence of INSTRAW. She pointed out that INSTRAW was the only institute within the United Nations mandated to conduct research and training for the advancement of women. Therefore, the imminent threat of ceasing its operations would be detrimental to the international community, for which the research findings of INSTRAW served as important tools for the formulation of policies to benefit women.

43. She continued by informing the Board about the financial crisis, which had required INSTRAW in February 1999 to reformulate its programmes. That resulted in further reductions in staffing. Given the obligations of the Institute to report on Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/48 and follow up on its recommendations, she noted the need for additional funds to be released from the current cash reserve of INSTRAW to allow for the extension of contracts beyond June 1999. In order to safeguard the future

of INSTRAW, she urged the Board to take immediate and definite action.

B. Attendance

44. The following members of the Board attended the session: Selma Acuner (Turkey), Esther Ashton (Bolivia), Zakia Bouaziz (Tunisia), Maria Jonas (Austria), Noelie Kangoye (Burkina Faso), Mona Chemali Khalaf (Lebanon), Norica Nicolai (Romania), Glenda Simms (Jamaica), Amaryllis Torres (Philippines) and Cecilia Valcárcel Alcázar (Spain).

45. The following ex officio members of the Board also attended: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to INSTRAW, Mr. Nitin Desai; the representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) representing all the regional commissions; and the representative of the Dominican Republic, the host country.

46. Also attending the session were the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Angela King; the former Director of INSTRAW, Ms. Yakin Erturk; the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, Ms. Minou Tavarez Mirabal; and the Senior Officer-in-Charge, Ms. Tatjana Sikoska. The Chief of the Economic, Social and Human Rights Service of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, Mr. Ali Khamis, and the Programme Budget Officer, Mr. Mikhail Liarski, were also in attendance. Mr. Anthony Miller, Principal Legal Officer, Office of Legal Affairs, attended as well.

C. Election of officers

47. At its 1st meeting, in accordance with rule 7 of its rules of procedure, the Board elected the following officers by acclamation:

President:
Ms. Amaryllis Torres (Philippines);

Vice-President:
Ms. Zakia Bouaziz (Tunisia);

Rapporteur:
Ms. Glenda Simms (Jamaica).

48. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, one member expressed appreciation for the work of the outgoing Bureau.

49. The newly elected President thanked the members of the Board for her election and expressed her commitment to fulfilling expectations in guiding the discussions of the nineteenth session. She stated that having been elected President was a distinct honour for her as well as for her country and region. She added that she would be even more honoured if the current session of the Board of Trustees arrived at decisions that would positively affect INSTRAW in the future. Moreover, she stated that the Institute was a symbol of gender commitments at an international level, and hoped that the session would identify means to empower INSTRAW.

D. Agenda

50. At its 1st meeting, the Board of Trustees adopted its provisional agenda (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.1/Rev.1), as orally amended, by consensus. The agenda read as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Election of officers.
4. Progress report on the activities of INSTRAW for 1998.
5. Review of the financial situation of INSTRAW.
6. Other issues of relevance to the functioning of INSTRAW.
7. Strategic work plan for INSTRAW.
8. Adoption of the report of the Board on its nineteenth session.
9. Closure of the nineteenth session of the Board of Trustees.

51. A member of the Board expressed appreciation to the staff for the timely distribution of all documents in the various languages.

E. Adoption of the report of the Board on its nineteenth session

52. At its 5th meeting, on 7 May 1999, the Board adopted the report on its nineteenth session (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.5 and Add.1–4), together with a working paper on matters to be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council.

53. Prior to the closure of the nineteenth session, the Board decided to target tentatively, depending on the Institute's financial situation, a date in February 2000 for the holding of its twentieth session.